

History of the Carlisle Fortnightly Club

by

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Before giving you a short history of the Carlisle Fortnightly Club, I'd like to tell you something of Carlisle in the year 1886, at which time the club was organized. I was a little girl but old enough to remember many things.

What a dear sleepy old town it was! North Street, South Street, East Street, and College Street on the west were the outskirts. The streets were all shaded by fine old trees, making the shadows even deeper on the soft dusty rose color of the old brick pavements. The houses upon High Street were mostly private homes, very few stores, and about five o'clock on summer afternoons strips of carpet and cushions were placed upon the front steps or "stoops", as they were called, and gradually the ladies of the households, in fresh cotton dresses would settle there. Everyone seemed to be comfortably off, with two colored maids in many homes—a laundress to come upon Mondays, and a typical shambling darkey, like our old "Mosie Whiting" (usually shared by several neighbors) to "tend" the yard. There were stables instead of garages, with horses and carriages for summer, and sleighs for winter with fascinating bells and bright colored pompoms. There was often a dog house large enough for little ones to crawl into, as was sometimes done, the vogue at that time being for the large Newfoundland dogs. There were fences, either of wrought iron or wood, and often tan bark walks—so soft under foot. There were flickering gas lamps at night, and not even those upon moon-light nights.

At the western end of High Street was "Mooreland", much like an English estate (now owned by Dickinson College) with, at that time, its high black painted paling fence, through which little faces never tired of watching the deer, sometimes twenty or more, and the peacocks strutting

about. We were always thrilled to see the victoria coming through the great iron gates—sitting in it, Mr. Johnson Moore, his long beard of silver glistening, wearing his cloak with the velvet collar, and his daughters with their high French heels, their tiny ruffled carriage parasols, and old black John perched above, wearing his high silk hat and his blue coat with brass buttons. At the eastern end of the street called York Rd. stood “Cottage Hill”, the James Bosler home (now the location of the home of Dr. George) where we liked to walk on Sunday afternoons to see the beautiful fountain playing in the front yard. Oh! it was a peaceful age and a dear old town, and in the year 1886 there came to Carlisle Dr. and Mrs. Super from Denver, Colo. Dr. Super was to be professor of modern languages at Dickinson College. One evening as Mrs. Super was walking down High Street, she stopped to chat with Mrs. Biddle, who was sitting on her front “stoop”. Upon being questioned, Mrs. Super said she liked Carlisle but missed the Denver literary club, and she wondered if one could be started in Carlisle. Whereupon the two of them talked it over and decided to make the attempt.

At this point I shall quote from the first entry in the first book of Fortnightly minutes—“Nov. 2, 1886. By invitation of Mrs. Super twelve ladies met at her residence to organize a Carlisle ‘Fortnightly Club’ to be a branch of the Denver ‘Fortnightly Club’ of which Mrs. Super had been a member four years.” These twelve ladies held an election of officers, Mrs. Super being made President, they decided upon their plan of work, adopting the Constitution and Bylaws of the Denver Fortnightly and they decided to have refreshments at the first and last meetings only, and to have a mid-winter reception to which each member could invite four guests besides her escort. The annual dues were to be one dollar.

As I wish you to visualize the charter members of the “Carlisle Fortnightly Club” I shall read a description of an early meeting of the club. This description of a meeting of the Club during its first year, is not imaginary, but just as I heard my mother (Mrs. John B. Landis) tell of it. I was a little girl, nine years old, at the time, and the description of the members is a combination of my own remembrance of them, and my mother’s estimate of them all.

It was a Monday evening, early in March, 1887, and the clock upon the black marble mantel leisurely struck seven times—clear bell like tones they were. The ball fringe upon the lambrequin draping the mantel was blowing gently in the warm air from the register, and the argand gas lamp cast a pleasant glow upon the marble topped table. Outside the snow flakes of a late snow storm were swirling about in a desultory way.

Little Mrs. Landis, carrying a vase of red carnations, hurried into the room and glanced quickly at the clock. She put the vase on the mantel, a small bell upon the table, and brought a glass of water for the reader of the evening's paper. The Carlisle Fortnightly Club was to meet, for the first time with her as hostess, and her cheeks were rosy, her eyes bright, and her heart a-flutter. Soon there was a stamping of snow from feet upon the porch, and by two's and three's the vari-colored "Twilighted" members began to arrive.

In the midst of laughter and chatter, promptly at the stroke of the half hour, the little bell was rung and order and silence reigned.

There they sat in a circle, the twelve charter members of the Fortnightly Club. Their bodices were tight-fitting, their skirts long, a little bit bustled, much paneled, puffed and frilled, and the vogue for the French twisted hair with frizzy bangs, was much in evidence. It goes without saying that they were all interested in, as their constitution stated, "the pursuit of study as a means of mutual improvement and culture" and that they were all interesting and worthwhile women.

To the right of the table, with her feet upon a carpet covered ottoman, sat the custodian of the bell, little Mrs. Super, the organizer and first president of the club. Her husband, a native of Perry County and a graduate of Dickinson College, was Professor of French and German at the College, and they lived on Louther Street across from the college campus at that time. Later they built and occupied a house on South College Street, No. 123. Mrs. Super was short and slight, very bright and witty, always ready to laugh. She wore nose-glasses with a gold chain attached and fastened with a bowknot pin upon her dress. Next to Mrs. Super sat Mrs. Sarah J. Pettinos, looking the picture of gentleness and benevolent kindness. Mrs. Pettinos was a widow and lived with her mother, Mrs. Wm. Porter, at the Mansion House, now the "James Wilson" Hotel. She had prematurely white hair and held her head regally. She was a fine looking and talented woman, exceptionally gracious to and interested in everyone, and she was a native Carlisler, being one of the four beautiful Porter sisters. Then came Mrs. Wm. Miller, whose husband owned a hardware store on North Hanover Street. They lived above the store. Mrs. Miller was lame, always using a crutch. She had a brilliant mind and a lovely countenance. Next to her, all animation and vivacity, sat Mrs. Edward W. Biddle. (Mrs. Biddle is the only charter member of the Fortnightly now living (1946) and for some years has been an honorary member.) Her husband was a successful member of the Bar, who a few years later became Judge of the County. They lived at that time in the house just west of the present Y.W.C.A. It was

Mrs. Biddle who with Mrs. Super selected the twelve charter members of the Club. Mrs. Biddle, charming and clever, was always interested in everything worth while. Then came Mrs. Wm. B. Lindsey, the wife of the professor of chemistry at Dickinson at that time. Mrs. Lindsey was a New England woman who had taught there, and she was a woman of great charm and intelligence and had a decided New England accent. Next sat Miss Fanny McCauley, the daughter of the President of Dickinson College. The President's mansion at that time was the eastern section of East College, with the latticed and honeysuckled portico, just as it was in the days of "Old Bellaire". Fanny was perhaps the youngest of the group, and amid all the befrizzed and banged members, her bangs were the frizziest, her waist the slimmest. She had a delicate but rather pretty face. Mrs. F. A. Durell sat next, and she was considered the Fortnightly beauty. She was tall, fair, with plenty of golden hair, which always seemed to be blowing about her face in an attractive instead of a careless manner. She wore a dress of a shade of peacock blue—and very lovely she looked. Her husband was Professor of Mathematics at the College, and they lived on West Street facing the Methodist Church. Little Mrs. Watts, a neat, tiny little woman sat upon a low rocker, for she was very small but very erect. She was a Carlisle girl, the daughter of Judge Hepburn, and married to Mr. Wm. Watts of the well known Watts family of Carlisle, who lived in one of those spacious mansions on East High Street, across from the Hotel Wellington. After marriage Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Watts, however, lived with Mrs. Watts's father, Judge Hepburn, in his large colonial house across the street just east of Hotel Wellington, the doorway of which, with its white marble steps, iron railings and exquisitely carved wooden door was so beautiful, that a photograph of it adorns the cover of "Carlisle, Old and New". Alas, in an age of desecration, it was destroyed. Little Mrs. Watts was a gentle little woman, with a very low sweet voice. Mrs. John B. Landis, the hostess of the evening, sat next. Her husband was an attorney, and their home, No. 36 North College Street, faced the campus. Mrs. Landis was also small of stature but great of heart. Her hair was glossy black, and as she was conservative, she had not yet succumbed to the prevailing mode, but wore it parted and smoothly drawn back into a braided coil. She was an enthusiastic member of the Fortnightly. Then came Mrs. Mary P. McKeehan, an extremely bright, interesting and youthful widow, who had been a Miss Parker of Carlisle. She lived with her mother upon High Street. She had a slender girlish figure, and a buoyant walk, which she retained all her life. Next, Miss Lydia S. Biddle, fascinating, quick at repartee, full of spirits and animation, and in her youth, a great belle among the dashing young officers from the Barracks. In Mary Dillon's novel "Old Bellaire" she represents Miss Lydia Biddle as the character "Lydia McNair". Miss Lydia was

a sister-in-law of Mrs. Edward W. Biddle, and she lived with her parents in another of High Street's old mansions. Last was Mrs. Annie G. Yates, with beautiful white hair, rather dark complexion and aquiline features. She was the widow of Capt. Yates, who was killed at the time of the Custer Massacre, during the war with the Indians, and it was said her hair turned white over night, at that time. She lived with her children on Pitt Street across from the old "Mansion House", which is now the "James Wilson Hotel", and gave lessons in piano and voice. She also conducted a dancing class, beloved by all Carlisle children of the "80's" and early "90's" where she taught those who attended much more than dance steps. She was a most interesting woman who loved young people, was always ready with a funny story and interesting chatter, and her home was the gathering place for the young.

We took this hasty glimpse at the first members of the Fortnightly Club while the business was being conducted in a dignified and impressive manner, then the President announced the paper of the evening—"Great Epochs in the World's History" by Mrs. McKeehan—but we did not hear the, no doubt, splendid and illuminating paper—we had to tip-toe silently away, as in 1887 we were not yet members of the Carlisle Fortnightly Club.

When the Fortnightly was just three years old, at a meeting on Feb. 7th, 1889, the president read a letter announcing the 21st anniversary of "Sorosis" in New York City, the first woman's club organized in the United States in 1868, to which ninety-seven women's clubs were invited, among them four clubs from Penna., one from Pittsburgh, two from Philadelphia, and the Fortnightly Club of Carlisle. Each one was asked to send a delegate to assist in the celebration on March 21st, 1889. It was decided to accept the invitation and a motion was made that Mrs. Pettinos go as a delegate. It was unanimously carried and gracefully accepted. Perhaps there are only a few of us now (1946), who remember Mrs. Pettinos, an aunt of two of our present members, Mrs. Bucher and Mrs. Williams, but you can rest assured that the club at that time and today may well feel proud of our delegate, whom the presidents of Sorosis, Chicago and Denver greeted—and I quote from the Fortnightly minutes—"with cordial tenderness and evidently our delegate made a most happy impression on the convention."

With the same minutes there is a complete copy of the report of the Carlisle Fortnightly delegate to Sorosis, and instead of my trying to tell you of the organization, the aim and plan of the Fortnightly, I will let our delegate, Mrs. Pettinos, tell you about it. But first I wish you could see her as she must have looked, standing before that group of distinguished women—erect, beautiful, wearing a gray silk dress, a corsage of violets, and a small

gray bonnet upon her prematurely white hair. She wore nose glasses with a slender gold chain and read, with no trace of nervousness and in a cultured voice, as follows:—"Madame President, ladies of Sorosis and delegate friends: I have not prepared a lengthy report, for the reason that I supposed there would be such a large number of delegates to hear from that the time would be necessarily short. I have therefore only a brief account to present of the organization of our club and its methods of work which I will endeavor to give you without any attempt at embellishment. So many beautiful flowers of speech have been gathered here the last few days that if I were to try to add to the store I could only bring you at best some simple hedgerow blossom.

"The Carlisle Fortnightly Club was organized Nov. 2nd, 1886. It is a daughter of the Denver and a granddaughter of the Chicago Fortnightly and we adopted their constitution and by-laws. Our club was organized through the efforts of a lady who had been a member of the Denver Fortnightly and who came to reside in our town. Twelve was our original number, but we now have nineteen members on our roll. I fear we have been a little selfish and exclusive in not wishing to bring into the club any but those who were thoroughly congenial to us. This interchange of thought and methods however, has given rise to broader views which I hope we will put into practice in the future. Our work thus far has been purely literary, our aim has been to stimulate and encourage a mutual desire for study and self improvement and the results have been most satisfactory. We are now in the third year of our existence. For the first two years we took up the departments of History, Literature, Art and Current topics, each member being required to write a paper upon one of the above named subjects. A Chairman was appointed for each department to lead in the discussion, after the reading of the paper. Papers were required to be not less than twenty minutes and forty minutes were allowed. To prevent the members from drifting into general conversation, our rule is to adhere strictly to the discussion of the subject for at least half an hour after the reading of the paper. At the beginning of the present club year, we changed our plan of work and instead of writing upon miscellaneous subjects, we decided to take up the study of different countries successively and learn all we could concerning them. Our present subject is 'Russia', the topical outlines as follows: 'The Present Political System', 'Terrorism in Russia', 'Religion', 'Manners and Customs', 'Industrial Interests'. These general divisions have been subdivided, making fifteen papers which cover the whole ground. We find the present plan of study more profitable and instructive than the former and we have thereby obtained better results. Our Club year begins Oct. 18th and ends April 18th. At our first meeting a "tea" is

given by one of the members of the club, and an entertainment is also furnished at the close of the season. At the annual meeting at the end of the Club year a committee is appointed, to map out the line of study and arrange the program for the ensuing year.

"I cannot take my seat, Madame President, without saying that in addition to the many delightful things you have prepared for us, I have experienced the most intense pleasure and satisfaction in meeting those whom I have known by reputation for years and whom I have greatly desired to see. It has been such a privilege to take them by the hand, to look into their faces and feel the thrill of sympathy which unites us all in one common bond. I trust I may be pardoned in making a personal reference to Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, Mrs. Crowly, Marion Harland, and others among you whom I might mention, whose helpful words and influences have done so much to brighten the home and elevate and enoble the cause of women. There is something sacred in the setting apart of a life to a noble purpose, the uplifting and bettering the condition of humanity. I am not ashamed to confess that I have a feeling of reverence almost amounting to worship for those grand women who notwithstanding all obstacles have labored and striven for the Right and who have placed their all upon the altar for the cause of Truth and Justice.

"Let us dear sisters honor and cherish these noble and gifted ones while we may. Let us scatter flowers in their pathway while yet they can enjoy their beauty and fragrance, ere the eye has grown dim and the ear is dull to the sweet sounds of loving words and kindly greeting!

"And now Madame President let me tell you that every member of our Club felt individually honored by the invitation from Sorosis, and for myself I must say that my enjoyment has been so rich and full that it is beyond expression."

Some of the early rules of the Fortnightly would frighten us today—for example, if a member remained away from two consecutive meetings without being ill or out of town, she was to be considered no longer a member, and a fine of ten cents was imposed for tardiness. For twenty-seven years the roll was called and fines collected. Oh! they were strict in those days. One of the older members used to enjoy telling this tale—The subject of the program for the year 1891-1892 was Germany, and the topic "The Metal Workers of Nuremberg" was assigned to Miss Jean Bosler (Mrs. Biddle's sister). Miss Bosler sent to numerous libraries and publishing houses and could find nothing upon the subject, and asked the Executive committee to allow her to select another subject. They were ada-

mant, however—it had to be “The Metal-Workers of Nuremberg”. Miss Bosler said nothing more, but the evening of the meeting she arrived with her notebook, and when the paper was called for, opened it—drew forth the replies she had had from the libraries and publishing houses she had written to, and said that was all she had to contribute. The minutes of that meeting are brief, no comment as to the paper, because there was no paper.

I remember so many things about the early members and their meetings which were always held in the evenings. They always walked, there were no automobiles, no taxis, no trolleys, at first nothing but Peter Cook’s “Herdic”—and I must confess when I drew that thought from some corner of my mind, I wondered if there really was such a word and looked it up in the dictionary. Sure enough—in the year 1886, a Peter Herdic in Williamsport, Penna., invented a bus, with a door in the rear and a seat along each side, used in many cities in the United States, so old Peter Cook, a Carlisle Negro, was enterprising indeed. This “herdic” could be sent for in real necessity, by messenger I suppose, because there were no telephones long ago. Members used to see each other home from meetings as well as they could, several husbands usually turning up which was a help. (Imagine no electric lights, just gas lights!) When the club met at the Indian School (now the War College) with Mrs. Pratt (whose husband, Gen. Pratt was in charge there) she sent the school bus to collect the members and sent them home the same way, and one time when they met with Miss Molly Hilton in Feb., 1888 (the Hilton farm on the Petersburg Road about three miles south of Carlisle) the members enjoyed a sleigh ride there.—Oh! they were hardy in those days!

Through the years the membership was gradually increased, beginning the second year, until we are as today (April, 1946). In the earlier years the club subscribed to several magazines, among them “The Review of Reviews”, “The Club Woman”, “The Arena”—each magazine to be kept three days only. I can see them all at home at different periods, but evidently the Club had a difficult time keeping track of their whereabouts, and at almost every meeting there would be an earnest plea for members to pass them along. At one meeting, as late as 1897—(I quote from the minutes)—“An effort to discover the whereabouts of the magazines resulted in the disclosure of the ignorance of all the members present in regard to the Matter”. For years a magazine roll call was held, as well as the regular roll call.

I love to think of those early meetings—my mother, at one time had a dark red dress with red velvet buttons, which I remember, she called her

Fortnightly dress. The members seldom wore hats but all wore upon their heads "twilights" or "nubias". When the Fortnightly met at our home—after they were all safely downstairs, I used to slip into the guest room, and look at the different knitted and silk head coverings—I regret to say—sometimes pirouetting before the mirror, the ones I liked, wrapped around my pigtails. I don't remember ever seeing a hat upon the bed. They came to spend the evening and loved it. At one time my mother had the Treasurer's bag—a garnet plush bag with drawstrings of garnet silk cord. That bag was passed from Treasurer to Treasurer and was always carried to the meetings for the collection of dues. I was amused when I read in the minutes of Oct. 4, 1897—"The Treasurer having produced her money bag, the annual dues were deposited with her". I have been thinking about that bag which in 1908, at the time I became a member, had become a tradition more than a necessity, and I have decided that long ago when those large heavy silver dollars were much in use, it was possibly a welcome means of conveyance.

With no reflection upon the General Federation of Women's Clubs, whose worth is well recognized, the relation of our little Fortnightly to it, during the sixteen years we remained a member, and as I picked up the thread through the minutes, is very amusing. When the Fortnightly was just five years old, and women's clubs of all types were springing up like mushrooms all over the country—the State Federation of Penna. Women's Clubs was born. The question of the Fortnightly joining was frequently brought up and tabled, until in 1897, they succumbed and became a member, dues three dollars a year. From that time at each meeting began the discussion as to ways and means to defray the expenses of a delegate to the meetings, usually resulting in assessment of members. The corresponding secretary became a very busy person, reading at the meetings, and replying to, the deluge of literature of all kinds—requests for the members to inform themselves as to Legislative bills, suggestions as to political candidates—travel groups—the Paris Exposition—University Extension group, suffrage, immigration, investigation of the state of our forests. There were many appeals for financial aid, even to an appeal from the "Pioneer Club" of Atoka, Indian Territory, asking for one dollar gifts to establish a library building. Through the years practically everything suggested was tabled, until the poor table must have wobbled with its weight. Over and over again the question of resigning was brought up, as the Fortnightly was purely a literary club with only the dues in the treasury, and practically all members were by this time members of the Carlisle Civic Club and so were "federated". In 1906 the Fortnightly voted to resign, but there must have been a misunderstanding, as the following year the bill for dues to the

Federation was received (increased to five dollars). After numerous discussions and letters, and out of deference to our own member, Mrs. Biddle, who was active in Federation affairs, and talked of for President of the Pennsylvania Federation (she became president in 1908) the Fortnightly reconsidered, and remained a member for six more years, until on Nov. 17th, 1913, we finally retired from the Federation, and that same year gave up roll-call at our meetings so we were indeed emancipated. However, joking aside, the delegates who attended the Federation meetings enjoyed them, and their reports to the Fortnightly were of great interest, and as one more reward for our having been a member for sixteen years, when the General Federation of Women's Clubs held their Golden Jubilee in Atlantic City in May, 1941, the Carlisle Fortnightly was invited to send a delegate as the Fortnightly had been a member fifty years ago. Again the Fortnightly was fortunate in selecting a woman of charm and dignity to attend as our delegate—our own Mrs. Springer, and at the pageant which was a feature of the convention, with all the delegates dressed in the period of fifty years ago, Mrs. Springer wore a blue silk dress she had worn when she was nineteen years old, with a black lace shawl. She carried a black lace parasol and we know she was gracious and lovely. We were again proud of our delegate.

The work of the Fortnightly as you all well know has been cultural improvement, and besides the papers which have been written through the years, we have had many interesting and instructive talks by Dickinson College faculty members and others, and occasionally a paid lecturer. We have had many delightful musical programs from our musical members, and yet, with the small amount in our treasury, we have almost each year done something unselfishly for community or national welfare. In 1907 the Fortnightly paid ten dollars tuition for a child at Miss Mahon's Kindergarten—and in 1916 the Fortnightly contributed \$1.00 and became a Life Member of the International Longfellow Association, the object being, the restoration and preservation of Longfellow's home. For a number of years we subscribed to the "Survey" for the Welfare Room—we contributed \$25.00 toward the publication fund of the book "Notable Women of Penna." Through the two world wars we have subscribed to the Red Cross, bought Liberty Bonds, subscribed \$6.00 toward furnishing the recreation room in the hospital at Carlisle Barracks, and supplied cookies for the jar at the "U.S.O." a number of times. The Fortnightly has given magazines to Hamilton Library and has given books to Bosler Library, and we must not forget our golden gift on our golden anniversary in 1936 of \$50.00 to Bosler Library for the purchase of books.

As I took my time browsing through the old minutes of sixty years, I noticed that the work all through the years has been much the same, but I do think that long ago when women had more help with their children and housework, and not so many outside interests, for there were practically no organizations for women except church societies, they went more deeply into things, worked harder over programs, in fact wrote more learnedly upon difficult subjects. Their papers were for the most part longer, and sometimes the writer of a paper became *really enthused*, judging from this "minute": "The club met on Dec. 20th, 1897, at the home of Mrs. Sellers, Sr. to hear Miss Jackson's paper upon "Literature of the Colonial Period" (Miss Jackson was one of the teachers at Metzger College). The secretary continues "the paper which was the longest in the annals of the club held the attention of the members until the hands of the timepiece on the table warned the secretary that it was time to retire in order to catch the trolley. Of the discussion following the paper there is no record.—Mary Colwell, Sec." Generally the discussions after the papers were rigidly conducted, and an early secretary wrote of the discussion following a paper, "It gave rise to unlimited argumentative display."

I think the Fortnightly has unconsciously followed dear Mrs. Petting's suggestion in her report, that we have perhaps, to quote her again "been a little selfish and exclusive in not wishing to bring into the club any but those who were thoroughly congenial to us." For many, many years, in spite of the fact that at times it was difficult to elect a member, the three black-ball system was used, in fact until a few years ago, when for some unaccountable reason so many names were blackballed, that finally a change was made in our constitution as to election of members. How it was accomplished I do not yet see, because the Fortnightly loves all the old rules and traditions.

I remember when, in the year 1908, with fear and trembling I expressed to Mrs. McIntire, (corresponding secretary at the time) my anxiety over accepting membership to the Fortnightly, she said, "My dear, you will find the Fortnightly members more than appreciative of the efforts of the young members—always understanding—never critical, have no fears along that score."

Fortnightly members always love the Fortnightly. In reading the old records I have been impressed over and over again with that thought, and I am sure we, who are privileged members today, can wish nothing better for our daughters, granddaughters, nieces and grand-nieces than membership and companionship in such a venerable and loved club.



